

Canon G11 – A Worthy Upgrade?

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The recent Canon G-series cameras have garnered praise from skilled photographers in their quest for a small, easy-to-carry camera that provides results rivaling much larger, bulkier equipment. In December of 2007, Darwin Wiggett reviewed the [12.1 megapixel Canon G9](#) and was very favorably impressed. A few years later, Guy Tal reported on his field experience with the [14.7 megapixel G10](#) and once again, a professional photographer was impressed with the image quality of the little camera. But as Guy stated in his review, digital noise – even though reasonably controlled – was one area where the small G series camera still couldn't compare to a DSLR. With 14.7 megapixels packed into such a small sensor, many of us began wondering how much noise reduction could be achieved if Canon scaled back on the pixel count and applied advancements in sensor technology to improve image quality instead.

Evidently, Canon was listening. The latest rendition of the famous G series camera has been scaled back to pre-G9 pixel count levels. At 10 megapixels, the G11 has only 68 percent of the G10's pixel count, but with the promise of improved image quality (full info [here](#)). With the never-ending race towards higher pixel counts with little serious improvement in image quality, this is very much what many of us have been hoping for. Having owned the G10 for a year, I set out to see if Canon succeeded in achieving this worthy goal. [B&H Photo](#) was kind enough to send me a sample of the G11 for the purposes of this review.

Though it is not my intent to give a detailed feature-by-feature review of the G11 and comparison to the G10 (plenty of other places on the Internet to get that information), there are a few noteworthy differences between the two worth mentioning here;

- Canon has brought back the swivel LCD, a feature that I very much missed with the G10. Though the LCD size has shrunk from 3.0 inches to 2.8, being able to swivel the LCD is an extraordinarily handy feature. The dot count remains about the same (461,000 on the G11 vs. 460,000 on the G10) so the LCD display is a bit sharper and brighter than the G10 – which was already very good.
- HDMI output for viewing still images on an HDTV. There's no better way to review the day's photos or to share them with friends and family!
- And of course, the new 10.0 Megapixel sensor coupled with Canon's DIGIC 4 Image Processor for improved low light image performance and reduced noise.



One of the first tests I performed upon receiving the G11 was to conduct a side-by-side image quality comparison to the G10. Though the image quality of the G10 is excellent, noise in sections of a photo with little or no detail – such as a clear blue sky – was always noticeable at full resolution, even at the lowest ISO settings.

To conduct the test, I set up a tripod on the edge of the pond in our back yard. I took one shot with the G10 at ISO 100, then placed the G11 on the tripod, lined up the scene and took three photos, one each at 100, 200 and 400 ISO. The results confirm that Canon has taken a leap forward in image quality with substantially lower noise levels. Since noise was one of my few concerns with the G10, the new G11 was starting to look even more impressive - at ISO 100, the G11 is remarkably cleaner than the G10. The G11 remains cleaner at ISO 200 but slightly noisier at ISO 400 vs. G10 at ISO 100.





Photo above - this scene was captured with the G11 on a tripod. The upper left corner was used for the noise comparisons below.



Full resolution noise comparisons, but with G10 file resolution scaled down to match smaller G11 files for a true "apples-to-apples" comparison.

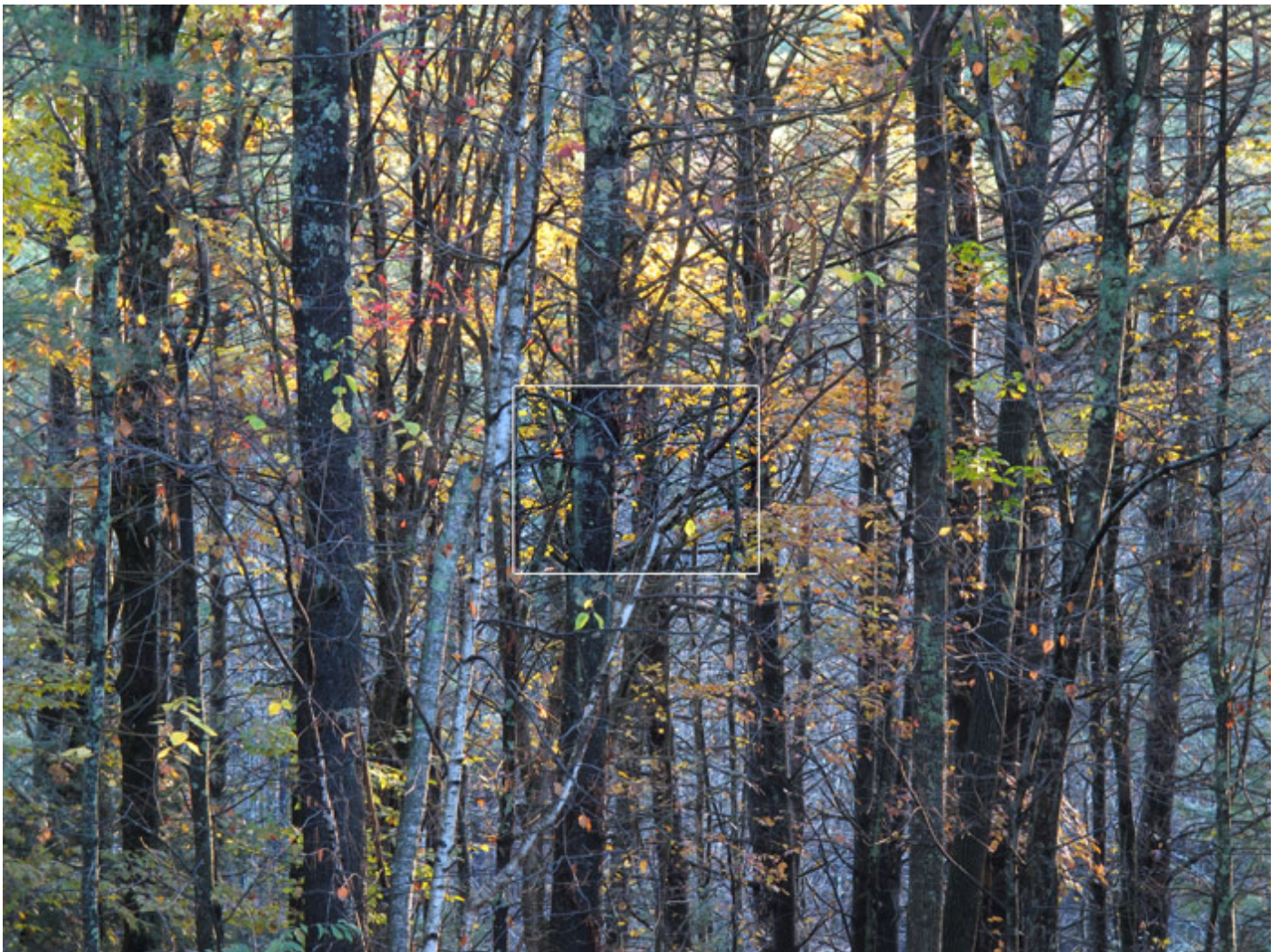


Photo above - a shot out the back door, with the camera braced on the door jamb.



Full resolution center section outlined in full frame photo above. Aperture Priority, f/5.6, .3 seconds, - 2/3 EV comp., ISO 100.

In terms of feel, looks and controls, G10 users can pick up the new G11 and go right to work. The exposure compensation dial remains, one of the best features of the G10. In fact, you have to look very closely to see any differences between the two in this regard. The same accessories I used with the G10, including a [LensMate hood](#) (which accepts 72mm filters), Wimberley P5 plate and a Canon 420EX Speedlight, work perfectly with the G11 and all fit very comfortably in a small LowePro S&F Toploader 65 AW bag. Total weight of bag, strap, G11 and accessories is under 4 pounds, making it relatively effortless to carry around. To travel even lighter, I can remove the LenMate hood and with the lens retracted, the G11 fits comfortably in a coat or vest pocket.



G11 with LensMate hood and wrist strap.

The true joy of the G11 is the ability to carry a competent camera without feeling like a pack mule. Like the G10, the G11 uses Canon's excellent Image Stabilization technology making hand-held photography much more effective. In combination with its superb image quality and professional level features, it makes leaving the DSLR home even easier.



Photo taken at the Keene, NH 2009 Pumpkin Festival. With the LCD swiveled down, I was able to hold the G11 over my head to capture this scene. Aperture Priority, f/4, 1/10th sec., - 1.66 EV, ISO 100.

So has Canon succeeded in making the G11 even better? I think anyone who takes their photography as seriously as those who participate on this site will find the G11 is a very substantial upgrade in image quality over the already excellent G10. For me, it's nice to know that I can travel light without feeling like compromises in image quality have to be made to do so.

[The new G11 is now available at B&H.](#) Time to break out the credit card – mine isn't going back.

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